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MMOZine

Issue 35 | December 2011

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

RIFT 1.6

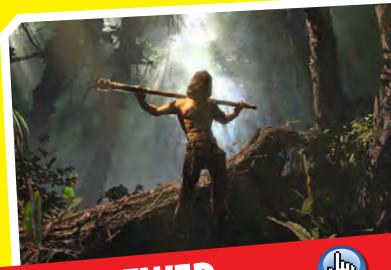
THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF 2011'S BIGGEST MMO!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: MISTS OF PANDARIA + DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

+ PREVIEWED

PlanetSide 2

What if Halo was an MMO?



+ PREVIEWED

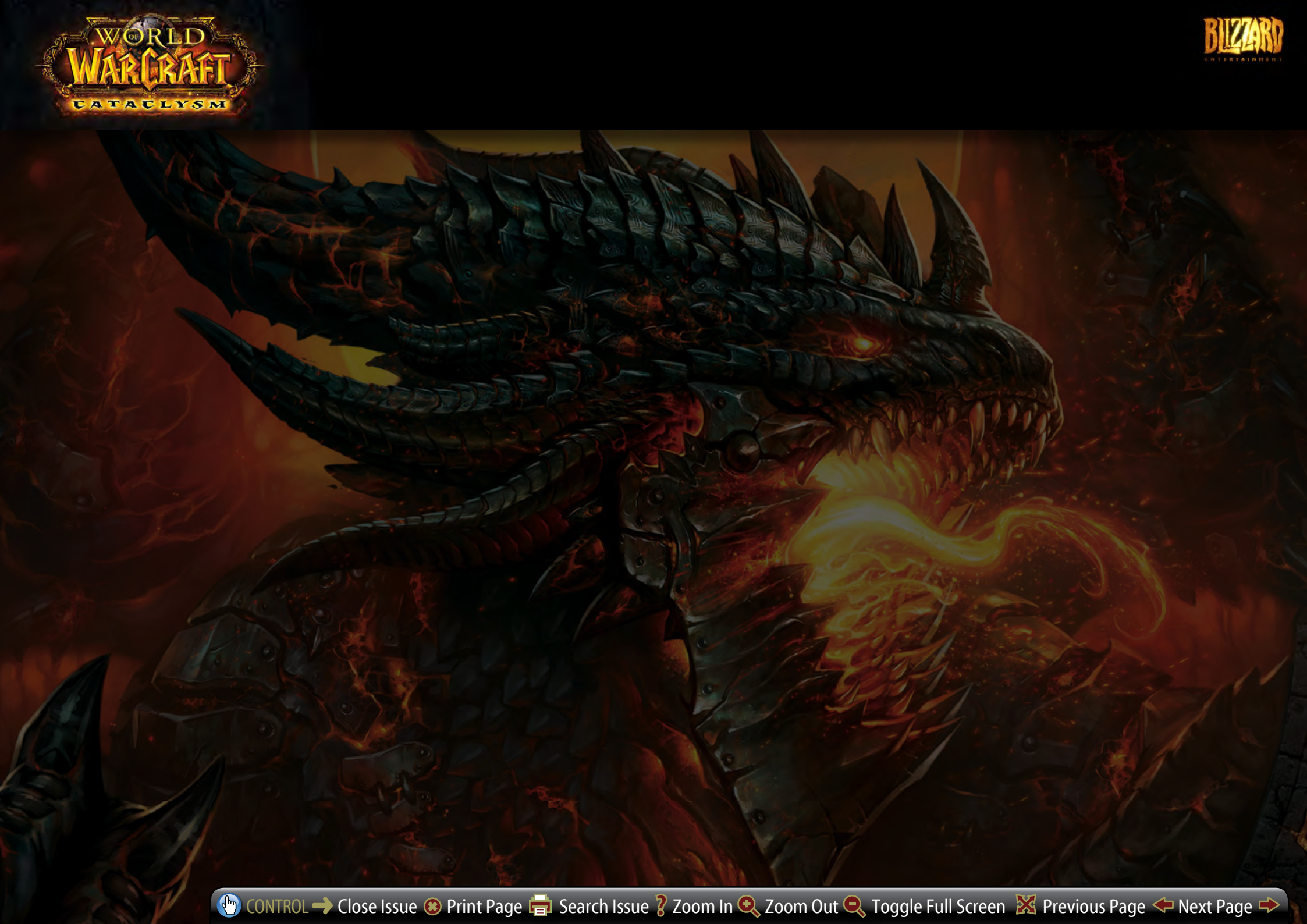
Path of Exile

Could this be the hit of 2012?

+ PREVIEWED

Star Wars: The Old Republic

Final hands-on preview and interview inside!


WORLD OF WARCRAFT
CATACLYSM
BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Welcome to MMOZine

As one chapter comes to a close, another one begins. This issue we're bringing you the review of the end of the Cataclysm saga, along with the definitive preview of Mists of Pandaria, the next chapter in World of Warcraft.

Rift is another MMO undergoing a transformation, as the 1.6 expansion is one of the largest we've ever seen. Find out exactly what you can expect as we talk to Trion Worlds about the work involved, and also what the future holds for the game.

And, while we're on the subject of chapters coming to a close, this is also the last issue that I'll be editing. From issue 36 onwards the mag will be in the very capable hands of Andy Griffiths. I hope you have a great Christmas and a stunning 2012!

Dean Mortlock, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

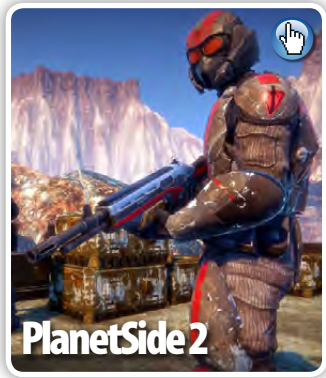
MARK PILKINGTON
Mark's taken a walk on the PlanetSide.

ANDY GRIFFITHS
Say hello to Andy. Our PC gaming expert also edits our sister mag, *PCGZine*.

DON'T MISS!

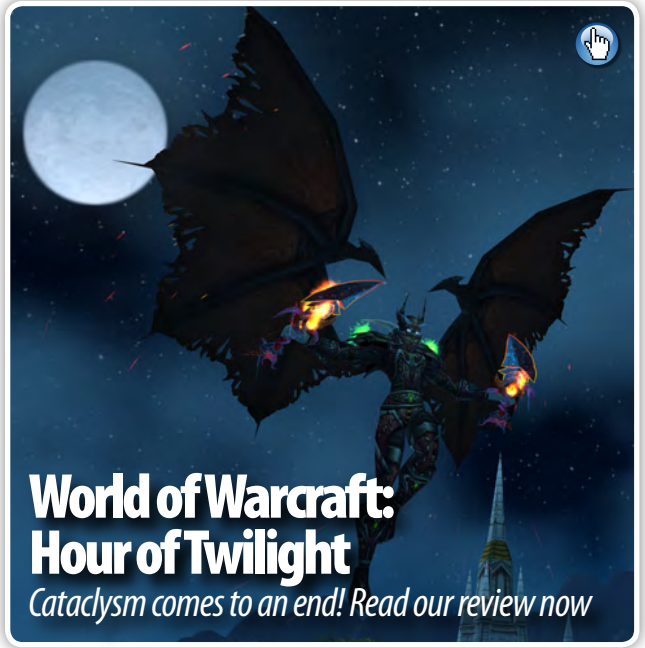
This month's highlights…

RIFT 1.6
Check out our in-depth look at 1.6



PlanetSide 2

Path of Exile



World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight
Cataclysm comes to an end! Read our review now

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Glitch
Lord of the Rings Online
APB Reloaded
The Secret World
8Realms
Anarchy Online
Star Trek Online
Rift 1.6
World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria
PlanetSide 2
Star Wars: The Old Republic
Path of Exile
World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight
DC Universe Online

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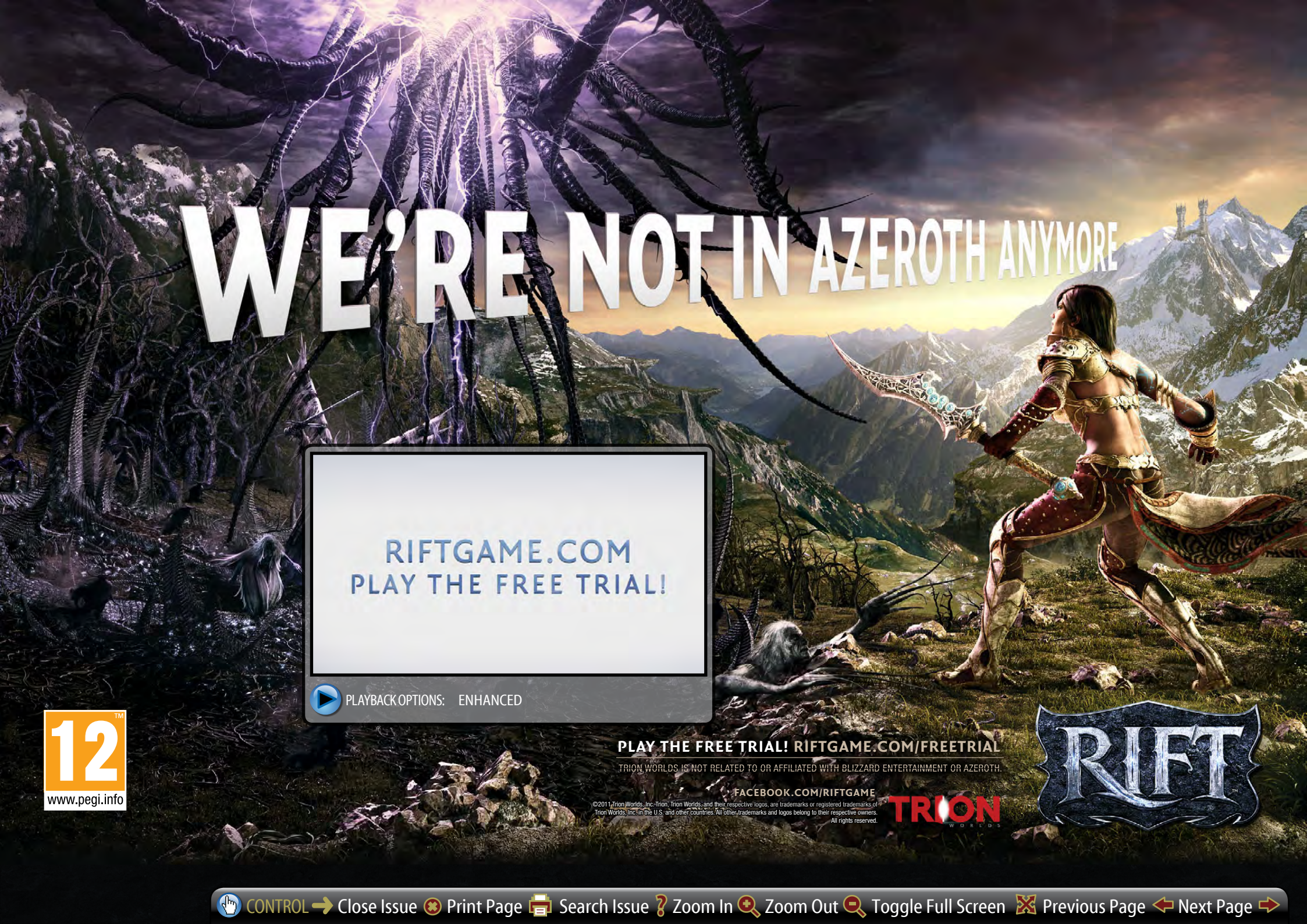
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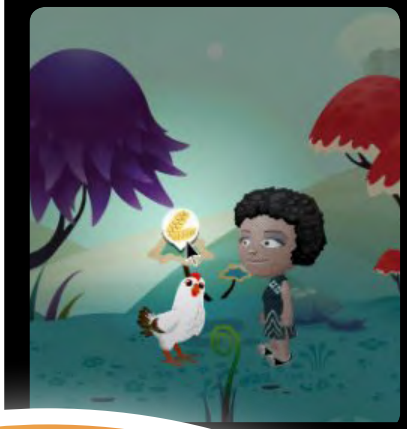
TRION WORLDS
RIFT

7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!



Glitch

Developer: Tiny Speck | **ETA:** Out Now

This cutesy, free-to-play MMO is going back to the Beta stage after officially launching earlier this year. The devs are looking to solve a myriad of problems that arose during the Beta, including reorganising player progression during the early levels. Good luck guys!

Star Wars: The Old Republic

Developer: BioWare | **ETA:** Out Now

You're about to read a lot more about SW: TOR in the rest of this issue but before you do, it's worth bearing in mind a few statistics gathered over the game's testing stage. Over two million players have sampled the game pre-launch and the servers contained over 750,000 testers during Thanksgiving weekend. Those are impressive numbers to say the least.

APB Reloaded

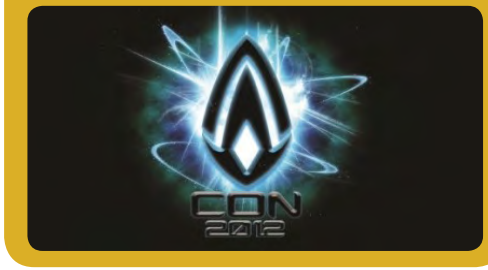
Developer: GamersFirst | **ETA:** Out Now

After an open Beta which lasted several months, Reloaded Productions have seen fit to properly launch their revived all-action MMO, APB Reloaded. The client is currently available on Steam and includes a wealth of new features. We'll be taking a look at this relaunch next month, so be sure to check back for our in-depth verdict.

Anarchy Online

Developer: Funcom | **ETA:** Out Now

Fans of this sci-fi MMO had to wait a while, but community-led GridStream Productions has gotten around to organising a dedicated event to celebrate all-things Anarchy Online. AO Con takes place in Michigan next August and will include the usual array of giveaways and cosplay comps.



Star Trek Online

Developer: Cryptic Studios | **ETA:** Out Now

The only MMO based in the Star Trek universe has once again been updated, this time introducing a new crew management system, improved skill trees and a drastic tutorial overhaul to make the game more interesting to newbies. The Season 5 update is another step towards Cryptic Studio's MMO going free-to-play during the first half of next year and we can't wait.

Lord of the Rings Online

Developer: Turbine Inc. | **ETA:** Out Now

After offering up the Rise of Isengard expansion a few months back, Turbine have announced they'll implement a new tool in the next update for LOTRO, which encourages players to find parties to journey into instances with. The unimaginatively named 'Instance finder' will reward players for joining random groups with currency bonuses and is aimed at allowing more independently minded gamers to see all the content on offer. When this tool is activated, players simply choose a role, target party size, difficulty and geographical location and from there they get put into a group after a brief search. Easy peasy!

8Realms

Developer: Jagex | **ETA:** Out Now

The studio behind RuneScape launched this all-new browser-based endeavour this month. Players need to guide a small nation to prosperity in eight different ages and it's supported solely by microtransactions.

ON THE RADAR

SUMMER
- Guild Wars 2

SPRING
- TERA

JANUARY
- Fortune Online

DECEMBER
- Star Wars: The Old Republic

ALLODS ONLINE

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PC DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

RIFT

Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: In-house
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.riftgame.com
OUT NOW

Rift 1.6

Rift aims for MMO supremacy, with its largest expansion yet

Without a doubt, this is the most ambitious update to what is this year's biggest new MMO launch, and we're happy to report that there's plenty of content to get stuck into in the 1.6 expansion for Rift. Flick the page to find out what exactly the expansion contains and read an exclusive interview with Trion Worlds about the past, present and potential future for Rift.

Rift 1.6 continued

Polished is a word that was used quite a lot around the launch of Rift. In our review in issue 29, we said: "Rift is an amalgamation of some of our favourite MMORPGs. From World of Warcraft, EverQuest and Aion, Rift nabs some of their best bits and blends them into a rather smooth experience." And that's certainly no bad thing at all. The success (both critically and commercially) of Rift would indicate that we weren't alone in thinking that, either.

But there are tough times ahead for Rift. Two of its main competitors, World of Warcraft and Aion have both released strong updates this year, and with Aion 3.0 and Mists of Pandaria, every indication is that they're upping the fight for 2012. Rift needed something impressive. It needed an expansion that was going to keep people busy playing well into the new year, and with 1.6 that's exactly what they've got.

New and improved

Probably the initial highlight of the 1.6 expansion is the new zone, Ember Isle. Adding a bit of backstory to the area, Ember Isle is where Laethys and Maelforge are working hard to restore their masters to power. It's also fleshes out the history of both the Kelari and the Dwarves. As the name and screenshots might already suggest to you, Ember Isle is a volcanic island. What might not be immediately apparent though, is the level of danger awaiting you. This is no walk in the park, and only those with

WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT?

A very quick guide to the highlights to be found in 1.6

EMBER ISLE
This massive new area is roughly twice the size of Stillmoor and is packed with tonnes of content for level 50 characters.

EMBER ISLE | CADUCEUS RISE | RISE OF THE PHOENIX | FAE YULE

IN THE ZONE

If you want to know the full picture, then who better to ask than Trion Worlds themselves?

How difficult is it to create a zone that's the size of Ember Isle?
It is challenging creating any new zone regardless of the size, although with Ember Isle being so big it did mean there was a lot more art to create as well as a ton of new content to fill up all that space.

One of the biggest challenges for Ember Isle was zeroing in on what new type of gameplay we wanted to introduce with this update. We went through several prototypes and iterations before we narrowed it down to Onslaught and the upgrade mechanic that players will find throughout the Island.

If you had to pick one element of 1.6 that you're most proud of then what would it be?
This is a tough question to answer, as there is no one thing. I think I am most proud of the fact that Ember Isle, which is the biggest zone to date, maintained the high level of polish that players have come to expect in Rift. This is true for all of the other content that was released in 1.6 as well, which included among other things, a new dungeon and new warfront mode.

Ember Isle continues the trend we have set for ourselves of trying out new things and exploring new possibilities. As with everything else we have released we will be paying attention to how our players like this new zone and using that information to tweak our plans for future updates.

There has been a staggering amount of updates for Rift in the short time it's been live. Is this a pattern you're planning on continuing for 2012?
We've always believed that our game is a service and that people paying us a monthly fee should feel they are getting value for their

Rift 1.6 continued

plenty of experience in the game will last the distance.

Ember Isle is a level 50+ zone that's packed full of new content, characters, a new defence-style gameplay and a much larger emphasis on Planar invasions. You'll also find two new Tier 2 raid Rifts, too – Dragon's Gold and Enkindled Flames. In short, there's plenty here to keep you busy, but despite the size of the island, there's still plenty more in 1.6 to keep you busy.

The Caduceus Rise dungeon has the distinction of being the largest dungeon in Rift so far. Built by the Kelari to honour the hugely powerful Telaran spirit, Caduceus, this new area has been created for a group of level 48-50 Ascended. Two Tier-2 Expert modes are also available.

Cool Yule

Next we have a very seasonal World Event to enjoy in the shape of The Fae Yule. Split into three delightfully festive segments – like the gaming equivalent of a Terry's Chocolate Orange, if you will – the first part went live on the 22nd of November, the second on the 7th of December and the third on the 21st of December. There's a seemingly countless amount of holiday-related bounty on offer, which should keep you more than busy over the Christmas period – including, oddly, a Corgi Pet.

The final major element to this expansion comes in the form of the Rise of the Phoenix sliver. There are plenty of rewards (including gear, pets and achievements) for the bravest adventurers (10 in total) and some stunning animation when you finally come face to beak with the phoenix itself...

Of course, there's plenty more to be discovered too, but we don't have the space to list everything here and half of the fun with a new expansion is finding all its nuances out for yourself. To whet your appetite further though, if you're yet to experience

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

subscription dollars. We said this from the very start and now I think players and the community at large see that we meant every word.

Ember Isle was not released to be the biggest zone as such, but just like all of our content updates, it was released to satisfy the needs of our player base. This is the philosophy we have followed from the start, listening to our player population and releasing content for all of the varied groups out there. Ember Isle targets the high-level players that want to do things other than raids and dungeons, although we added a new dungeon in this update also.

So how are you going to go about improving on an update the size of 1.6?

We are not interested in just putting something out that is bigger and bigger. Ember Isle happens to be a large zone but anyone going there will see that it maintains the high standard of quality that the rest of the zones have. That is what we strive for, maintaining and improving the quality bar we set for ourselves right from the start.

Over the last few months, Raiders, Crafters and casual players have all seen content added for them and they will see more in the future. Ember Isle satisfies the more casual high-end players, broadening the level 50 experience significantly. Other groups that we have plans for in the near future include the role-playing community and guilds.

We're excited to hear about the Instant Adventure mode. What can you tell us about that?

By the time you read this you will be able to try it out, as it will then have gone live. In a nutshell, it is a way for players who don't have a large commitment of time to jump in and have some instant fun and then leave without feeling that they left people in the lurch. This is yet another case of us listening to our players, identifying a

Rift 1.6 continued

all that 1.6 has to offer, then you should keep an eye out for the 15v15 Black Garden Warfront, the improved Ascend-A-Friend updates (which can now be done from inside the game), improved mount abilities and a new range of Start Menu buttons. For the full breakdown, check out the 1.6 patch notes on the official Rift site.

The future's bright

Trion Worlds has laid the foundations for a bright future for Rift in 2011. Whether or not that can continue through 2012 and beyond remains to be seen, but the indications are that Rift is definitely an MMO that's here to stay. As more and more MMOs switch from a subscription model to a free-to-play one though, one can only wonder how long it will be before Rift goes the same way. We've seen enough games make the transition smoothly though to know that isn't a concern for a game's longevity.

Rift may not be the most original MMO on the market, but it is one that's learned from the mistakes of its peers, and as a result thoroughly deserves its place in the hearts and minds of gamers the world over.

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

specific group and coming up with a feature or some content that would make them happy.

Instant Adventure was tailored to people that like to play in a group but feel that they don't have the time to commit to playing a dungeon, because in that case leaving the group can put your fellow players in a difficult situation.

Instant Adventure is a much more casual affair. You can join in when you like, run around and do some activities in a group, have a blast, get rewarded and when you are done you can leave without there being a detriment to the players that are left.

When it comes to planning a new update, is it based on player feedback, a desire to keep up with your competitors, or a mixture of the two?

I think that by now you will have probably picked up on the fact that we listen carefully to our player feedback. As for our competitors, I think it is more a case to them trying to keep up with us!

If you were selling Rift to someone who'd never played it before, then how would you go about it?

I think this is best done by quoting one of our players: "I played Rift and then tried my old MMO again… I just kept waiting for the invasions and events… Finally, I just went back to Rift."

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World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria

"The dust has settled and it's time to look a little deeper at what WoW's fourth expansion has to offer"

Kung Fu Pandaren

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft series, Diablo series
Link: http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/game/mists-of-pandaria
ETA: TBC

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Mists of Pandaria

So, the Cataclysm is over, and it's that time when we traditionally look forward to the next expansion. Mists of Pandaria was announced at BlizzCon and the revelation that the legendary Pandaren will finally be a playable race has split fans down the middle.

But, now the dust has settled, it's time to look a little deeper at what World of Warcraft's fourth expansion has to offer.

The big draw is, of course, Pandaria. This continent has gone down in the lore and myth of Azeroth as the fabled home of the alcohol-loving Pandaren from Warcraft III. The Emperor of the peaceful people made a deal to hide the land in the wake of the Sundering which ripped Kalimdor apart 10,000 years ago. Now Deathwing's Shattering has ripped through the veil of mist and magic to reveal the mystical island floating in the southern seas.

But the Pandaren we're going to be playing aren't those isolationist

Roll over screen for annotations

Pandaria is a lush island full of wildlife and danger.

The Pandaren have an ancient but peaceful culture.

Mists of Pandaria cont.

creatures. Oh no, we get to start our adventure on the Wandering Isle, a giant turtle named Shen-zin Su, where you'll be spending your first 10 levels before picking a side in the war between Horde and Alliance. It was also this starter zone that players got to experience at this year's BlizzCon, including the chance to play the new Monk class.

The Monk – which will be available to all Horde and Alliance races except the Goblins and Worgen – is a class which is equally good regardless of whether you want to play as a tank, a DPS or a healer. They can wear either cloth or leather and use a power called chi instead of mana that fuels their attacks. Blizzard explained during BlizzCon that they are skilled fighters who use martial arts and then draw their weapons to deal devastating finishing moves. Yes, this is one class that is definitely going to be a force to reckon with. Choose to play as a Pandaren and you'll also get some pretty awesome racial abilities including a cooking and food bonus, 50 per cent less damage from falling and a rested bonus which lasts you twice as long.

When it comes to Pandaria itself, Blizzard is heeding lessons learnt from both TBC and Wrath. The island is self-contained so you won't be flitting across Azeroth as we have been during Cataclysm. Also, unlike Hellfire Peninsula in TBC, each

faction will start in different areas and, eventually, meet in the middle. Like Northrend, Pandaria is split into different zones but these, from the early concept maps shown during BlizzCon, seem much larger than those found in the frozen north.

At the centre of the island is the Vale of Eternal Blossoms which is surrounded by the Valley of the Four Winds, the Townlong Steppes, Kun-Lai Summit and the Jade Forest. The other factor, learnt from Northrend, is to prevent players from being able to fly until they hit the level cap of 90 in order to preserve the experience.

Mists of Pandaria cont.

But, of course, a new continent does not an expansion make. There's plenty of other stuff, including new heroic dungeons. Yes, after the success of Shadowfang Keep and Deadmines, we're going to be getting a revamped two-wing incarnation of Scarlet Monastery along with a new version of Scholomance! Blizzard are also instituting new Dungeon Challenge modes which will give older dungeons a new challenge such as timed runs which will then be ranked and give you gold, silver or bronze medals.

There will also be plenty of new PvP arenas and battlegrounds and new PvE Scenarios which will be given tasks to complete, such as preventing Kobolds from overwhelming Goldshire. Blizzard also hinted that these Scenarios would also be a great way to earn reputation and also do events which don't rely on the traditional groupings needed for dungeon runs.

"There will be plenty of new PvP arenas and battlegrounds"

Blizzard hasn't offered any hints yet about when we can expect to see Mists of Pandaria but this is certainly going to be an expansion packed full of awesome features. While many might mock, the inclusion of the Pandaren is the first step in an exciting new narrative which will see the Horde and the Alliance at war. Yes, finally there's a reason for the game being called World of Warcraft and we can't wait.

Even the earliest screenshots show off the beauty of the new expansion.

PET BATTLE SYSTEM

The other major addition is the new pet battle system. This will take all those dozens of pets you've collected over the years and give them a purpose. Oh, and it will also seem very familiar if you've ever watched a certain anime series. As well as naming your pets – which is sure to have loads of you cheering – it will be possible to level them in a similar way to hunter pets. This will culminate in turn-based battles which will earn experience and new abilities for your pet. Blizzard even revealed that there will be Wild Pets, which will require you to be in certain places at certain times and, only when the conditions are right, will these elusive creatures appear.

MMOZine Verdict

Set to recapture hearts of former and current players alike, MoP is a new start for WoW

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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PLANETSIDE 2

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: In-house
Heritage: EverQuest, DC Universe online
Link: www.planetside2.com
ETA: Early 2012

PlanetSide 2

World War Free

"PlanetSide 2 blends the MMO experience with the mechanics of a first-person shooter"

Ever wondered what a Halo MMO would look like? Chances are, if your imagination is anything like ours, it would end up resembling something like PlanetSide 2. Not so much a sequel but a reimagining of Sony's original 2003 release, PlanetSide 2 blends the traditional MMO experience with the mechanics of a first-person shooter. Granted, drawing a distinction between an MMO and an online shooter like Call of Duty is becoming increasingly hard to do these days, but PlanetSide 2 features a range of customisation and complexity that no current FPS could ever hope to achieve.

While the first PlanetSide came out almost a decade ago now, it was at a time when broadband speeds were in their infancy. Network lag has always been the arch nemesis of online gaming, especially when it comes to first-person shooters where a split-second can make all the difference between hitting an opponent or missing them completely, and PlanetSide was no exception to that rule. Fast-forward to 2011 and thanks to the increased bandwidth available to modern gamers, this will no longer be a problem, and it is something the developers have taken full advantage of.

As part of their plan to get as many people as possible

The in-game characters sport a distinctive style, more than a little reminiscent of the Halo franchise.

HOW TO WIN THE WAR

The basic principles behind PlanetSide 2 are simple, as the main focus is to control a territory and defend it against enemy attack. Each territory holds valuable resources which can be used to arm your forces and increase your strength. As you grow in power, you can then set about trying to take control of other areas of the vast game map. Be careful though, as your enemy has exactly the same idea, and while seizing control is one thing, keeping it is quite something else…

PLANETSIDE 2

PlanetSide 2 continued

playing the game, Sony are releasing PlanetSide 2 as a free-to-play title on both the PC and PlayStation 3 formats. Whether there will be microtransactions involved to enjoy the full PlanetSide 2 experience remains to be seen, but whatever the case we have been promised that there will be no need to make any customary purchases in order to play game. Long live the free economy, we say.

Sony are quick to point out that this is not so much a sequel but a reimagining of the original. So while you will still find many of the same elements present from the first game – such as the same factions, the same weapons and

the same vehicles – there will be plenty about the game that is new. Furthermore, Sony plan to release more content over time, which will include new customisable weapons and vehicles.

The scope for the game is vast, as living up to its name, players will be able to battle across an entire planet. As well as updating the arsenal available to you, Sony are also looking to continually expand the game's terrain, which means you will be able to fight in a wide variety of locations, such as cities, deserts and even across the ocean. Each of these terrain types can be explored via land or air.

Of course, as with any revamp, better graphics and improved gameplay have been assured. We will find out just how much it is improved when it's released early next year, but we hope to bring you a more in-depth lowdown before that when the official Beta goes live within the next month or so. There may not be a Halo MMO on the market yet, but if PlanetSide 2 lives up to its promise, then we may not even need one.

This in-game action shot gives you an idea just how fast and frantic the action will be.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Set on the chaotic, battle-hardened world of Auraxis, the back-story of PlanetSide 2 had been written by comicbook veteran Marv Wolfman. Having spent over 30 years writing for both Marvel and DC comics, PlanetSide 2 is Marv's second project with Sony Online Entertainment, his first being DC Universe Online. Taking the original PlanetSide story, Marv has expanded it and created a storyline rich enough to rival that of any science fiction space opera.

MMOZine Verdict

This reboot is shaping up to attract a new generation of Halo fanatics

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare Austin
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.swtor.com
ETA: December

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Star Wars: The Old Republic

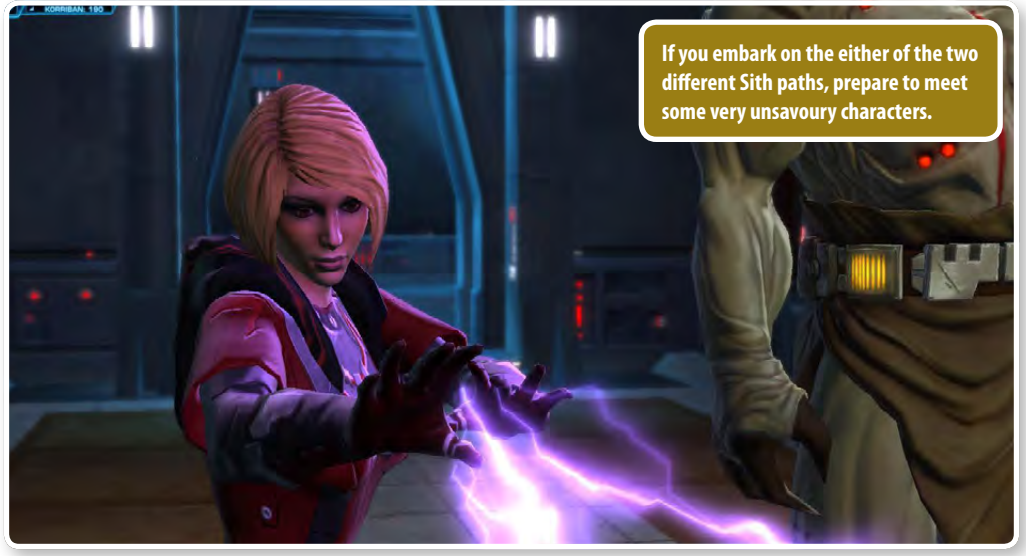
Star Wars: The Old Republic

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND VIDEO!

The wait is almost over…

"Unsurprisingly for such a well-financed endeavour, The Old Republic performs just fine"

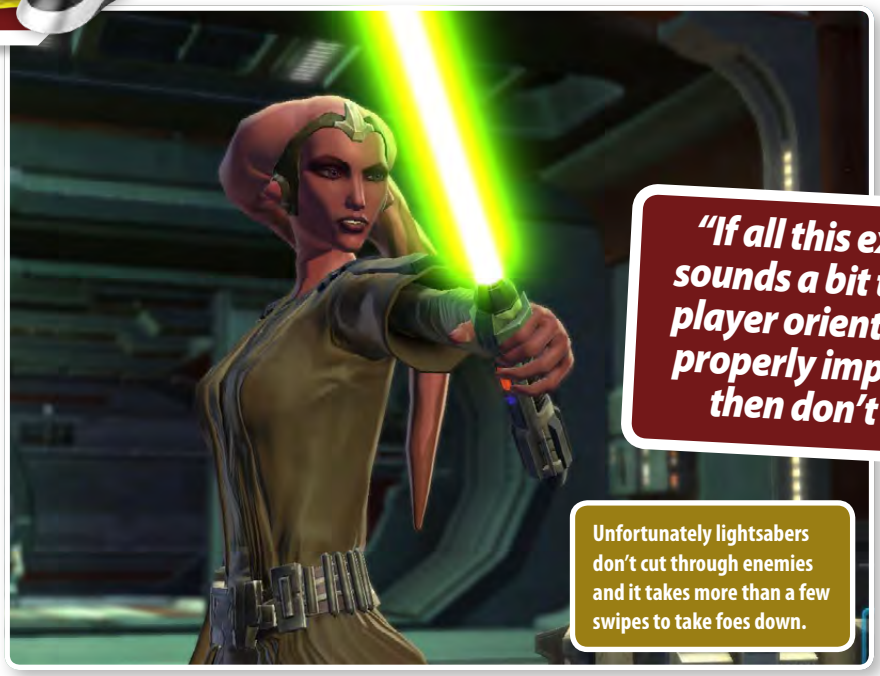
Over the past year we've had the privilege of sampling BioWare's MMO during several carefully controlled occasions with servers only occupied by testers and developers, but at the end of November the game's doors were finally opened to almost everyone (at least if the server queues were anything to go by) and we finally learned exactly how this story-based MMO would fare when servers are invaded en masse come release day. Would the integrity of the Star Wars tales BioWare so desperately want to tell be overwhelmed by the sheer number of players clogging up servers, or would the most fiction-driven MMO to date weather the storm? Well, unsurprisingly for such a well-financed endeavour, The Old Republic performs just fine.



If you embark on the either of the two different Sith paths, prepare to meet some very unsavoury characters.

CHARACTER CREATION

Like other MMOs there's a multitude of different sliders, hairstyles and body choices to determine when creating your character. However, where The Old Republic differs is that players can only choose certain races of character for certain career paths, and even though this is a bit restrictive it does tally up with the Star Wars universe. At launch there will be nine races to choose from, but undoubtedly more choices will be added in the future.



"If all this exposition sounds a bit too single-player orientated to be properly implemented then don't worry"

Unfortunately lightsabers don't cut through enemies and it takes more than a few swipes to take foes down.

Each of TOR's 19 planets are vastly different from each other and feature all the traits you'd expect – Nar Shadaa looks particularly groovy!

The Old Republic cont.

After previously choosing Bounty Hunter and Jedi Knight character classes, we decided to go for something a bit more sinister, electing for a Twi'lek Sith Inquisitor. Starting as a former slave, our character was drafted into a clique of wannabe Sith controlled by a maniacal overseer, who despised our alien heritage and favoured his own protege to be a new Sith apprentice for a lord who was too busy to train herself. If all this exposition sounds a bit too single-player orientated to be properly implemented don't worry, as the class-specific story hits you hard at first, but it's all about establishing which kind of character you want to roleplay as early on.

Every quest you come across involves multiple-choice dialogue and fully voiced conversations, where again you have the opportunity to put your own spin on proceedings. As you'd expect, there are also choices verging between the light and dark side of the Force which need to be selected in order to determine your

NOT A PIECE OF JUNK

As we've mentioned before in *MMOZine*, at around level 14 (or more accurately when you finish the first quarter of your class-specific story questline) you'll unlock your own ship. The feeling of having the entire galaxy open to you after only venturing to two different planets will drive most players giddy with excitement and it undoubtedly was the highlight of our time with TOR. Here you can store gear, chat with your companions and survey the galaxy for exploration.

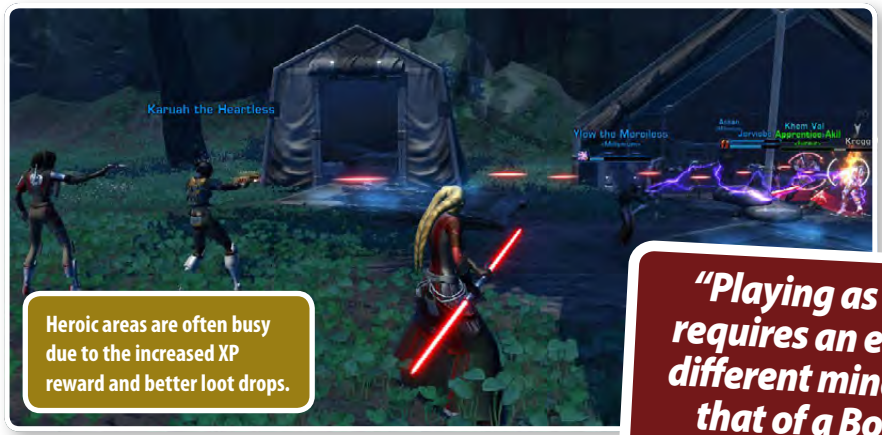
The Old Republic cont.

alignment, but these decisions are fairly sparse as you continue up the character levels.

The key word to describe TOR is accessibility, and BioWare has done a fantastic job of explaining everything via optional tutorials, and only ever offer up a few skills each level to allow players to learn exactly how to use them properly. This is crucial, as playing as a Sith requires an entirely different mindset to that of a Bounty Hunter or a Trooper, and most impressively even the advanced class choices require a lot of thought. At level 10, players have the opportunity to spec up, and despite showing both skill-trees before asking players to make the choice, it's still a genuinely tough decision for you to make.

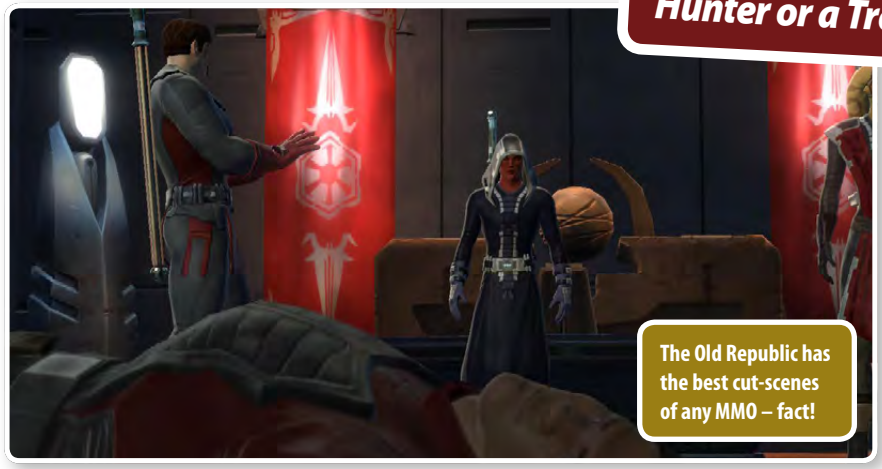
As a Sith Inquisitor we had the choice between the Force-dependent Sorcerer and the more hand-to-hand combat-orientated Assassin, and it really felt like an impactful choice.

Combat still relied on the classic stealth/rogue archetype, with the Assassin advanced class hinging on hitting foes unaware from behind for a damage bonus, but it still proves to be fun. Killing legions of Star Wars-related fodder doesn't quite feel as 'Heroic' as BioWare would attest, but it's still enjoyable, and teaming up with others is easy. Although the presence of AI companions



Heroic areas are often busy due to the increased XP reward and better loot drops.

"Playing as a Sith requires an entirely different mindset to that of a Bounty Hunter or a Trooper"



The Old Republic has the best cut-scenes of any MMO – fact!

"THIS IS RED FIVE. I'M GOING IN!"

Unfortunately, the space combat missions in The Old Republic are little more than on-rails shooting segments where players need to use their ship to shoot down enemy pilots, take down capital ships or disable space stations. These portions are gimmicky and don't really tie together with the rest of TOR's multi-path quest structure, but they do look really nice and players earn XP for any destruction caused or objectives met. Your ship can get shot down and objectives can fail, but still the action feels much more in-line with Rebel Alliance rather than X-Wing vs Tie Fighter. That said, we're glad space combat has made its way into TOR, we just wish proceedings involved a bit more strategy than just pointing and clicking or occasionally deciding whether to use limited missiles or not.

The Old Republic cont.

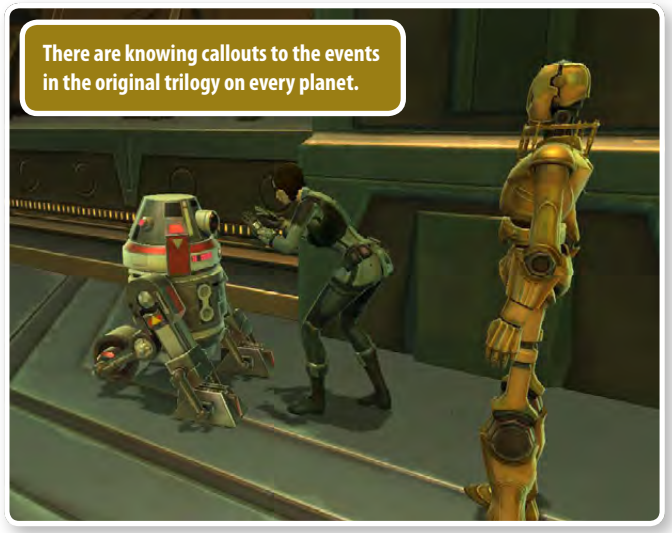
eliminates the need to always team up in player groups, there are special areas which contain more powerful enemies than the rest of the map and instances to encourage that kind of dynamic.

As we see it, TOR's greatest strengths are those which have come across wholesale from BioWare's single-player RPGs. The sense of ownership you'll feel when you unlock your first lightsaber or set foot in your own class-specific ship is genuinely palpable, and it just makes your adventures feel so much more genuine. Most impressively it doesn't feel as though you're walking a path which somebody else has already strived to achieve as you have a lot of scope to customise your experience via the choices you make and how you treat your companions. Importantly, worlds are also split into shards accommodating 500-plus players, with the maximum we noted during the Beta hitting around 800. Even though that number sounds slim it actually benefits the overall experience, as you aren't regularly seeing similar builds of your own character strutting around.

Essentially The Old Republic is exactly what we expected it to be, a polished and entertaining MMO experience which fully engages players in a Star Wars universe. It may be too linear for some tastes and the reliance on story driving progression might not be enough for the more competitive players out there, but anyone who values a good story and player choice should definitely check it out when it's released this month. World of Warcraft has another contender for its MMO supremacy.

When in a group conversation, players select their choices and a random diceroll determines which response is registered.

The interface will be familiar to anyone who has played an MMO before, and all the functionality you'd expect is here.


There are knowing callouts to the events in the original trilogy on every planet.

MMOZine Verdict

A lofty, story-driven MMO which fully delivers on its promise

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

Forging Light in the Darkness

We quiz Senior Environment Artist, Mike Harnisch on planet design in Star Wars: The Old Republic

> **"When we decided we were coming to the MMO space, we wanted a few things: longevity, scalability and beauty"**

Usually when we get to interview developers we get a Producer, a Director or somebody high up who's very on message, but doesn't know too much about the minutiae of designing an online-only game. For Old Republic that wasn't the case as we got to ask Mike Hamisch, Senior Environment Artist, some really in-depth and technical questions. He principally designed Alderaan and Hoth in this year's biggest MMO release, and we thought we'd have a chat with him about what it takes to design a planet.

Why was the comicbook-esque art style chosen for Star Wars: The Old Republic? As it has become quite controversial…
I think that when we decided we were coming to the MMO space, we wanted a few things: longevity, scalability and beauty. We want longevity, so we didn't go realistic. We're going to be playing this game for the next 10 years, so we want to make sure that what people are going to experience eight years from now is going to look good – that it won't look wrong.

Also, we wanted to make sure that all of our fans could play the game and from our testing standpoint that was a tough choice, because we needed to be very smart in the way we built things. We can have it run on lower machines, but then also look gorgeous and beautiful to reward those that have better machines. So you have to make sacrifices there, and I felt like we made the

In SW:TOR you'll get your ship very early on, and from there the galaxy is your oyster!

Tatooine is everything you'd expect and includes travelling Jawas.

Interview continued

right choice.

We have a lot of very credible technical artists. We've created tools, shader tricks and other things throughout the process that we've had to go back and reverse engineer. The game has gotten progressively more beautiful because of that and we have some really cool room lighting tricks which grant the game a more concept art feel.

It's definitely an art style which grows on you the more you play. The problem with Star Wars lore is that each world is only supposed to have one meteorological feature. As an artist how can you possibly bat against that?

In Alderaan we have a huge planet, so we needed to use colour and shape to delineate space, otherwise you'll get bored with the planet. Compared to the early planet of Dromund Kaas, our latter planets like Hoth, Tatooine or Alderaan are huge! These are much bigger planets, so we had to get creative with them. When people are loading into this planet we need to make sure their experience and the load times are good – we had to be very strategic about how we had to do that.

With Alderaan we just decided to have an Imperial side, a Republic side and a part that's shared, and we defined each area with an artistic style that puts that across. We have the Killiks on Alderaan and they have a very distinctive style. We used the original Seventies concept art to design the Killiks and Star Wars fans will get a massive kick out of that.

> **"We used the original Seventies concept art to design the Killiks, and Star Wars fans will get a massive kick out of that"**

With 'Dro' (Dromund Kaas) it's a smaller planet, so there wasn't as much need to create vastly different experiences, but we really wanted that planet to feel Sith and I think we did a great job of that. It still has its beauty, with the rain etc. Each planet has gone through many iterations.

When you sit down and design a planet how important is accessibility in that?

First we're serving story and then we're serving design. What I mean by that is before I started designing Alderaan, I talked with Daniel Erickson and asked, "What is the story of Alderaan?" Daniel sat down and explained there's a civil war with two houses – House Organa and House Thull – who are being courted by the Imperials. When I sat with Daniel he said this is

Balmorra has a cool post-industrial revolution vibe to it.

When flying around in your ship, you get to admire planets from afar.

Interview continued

kind of the calm before the storm, so I had my ideas.

There was one which we didn't go with, but I mentioned why don't we go with an eerie green vibe like the eye of the hurricane and I gave my pitch. It was something we decided not to implement because we had similar ideas for other planets, but everything is driven by story.

Working for BioWare, that's ingrained in your conscious from day one. So we start with that and then design-wise we ask, 'How is this going to be fun? How should this terrain be? Will the animations look right'?

"We didn't just want to make a Star Wars game, we wanted to create something of substance"

As far as the fans go we wanted to make it look like Star Wars. I really like the planet Balmorra which has these incredible rock spires, but then it has these really cool metal buttresses, so it feels like here's where the man come in, or where Star Wars comes in, to handle this planet and set up shop. It feels different to if you're playing another MMO which doesn't have those sci-fi elements.

Each planet has its own unique look and feel. It's almost has a tourist vibe to it...

Oh yeah, and that's definitely intentional. We really wanted to offer that experience, and that's probably one of the reasons why everyone should play through as both Empire and Republic at least once, as they'll get to experience those single-faction planets like Hutta and Dro. It's great that we have 19 planets, because even if you just play it through once you'll still see a lot. We definitely had all that stuff in mind when we built the galaxy.

Each planet has at least a few outposts which all have their own look and feel.

Dromund Kaas has a myriad of Sith statues to remind visitors who's in charge.

That is a massive string to The Old Republic's bow as the last 10 years for Star Wars fans haven't been pretty. You could almost say it's a franchise on a downward spiral...

For me it's just about playing an intriguing emotional story, there really are moments where you're taken aback.

When your master gets slain or whatever else happens, you really feel something. It doesn't even matter that it's Star Wars, as you're part of an epic story which contains heroism and love. When you chuck Star Wars on top of that, which inspires a warm and happy feeling for our generation, I think it just makes that experience even more visceral and emotional.

The Star Wars aspect of it is almost like the icing on the cake. We didn't just want to make a Star Wars game, we wanted to create something of substance. We wanted to take that to as many people as we could and by taking an IP which is beloved around the world really helps.

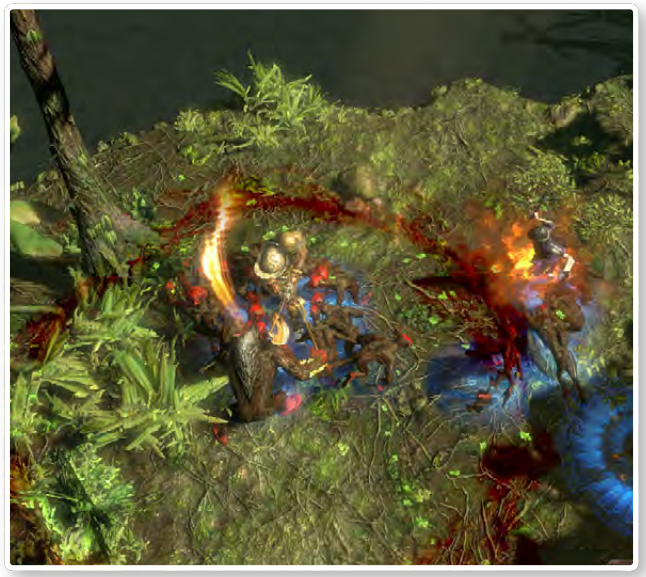
Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare Austin
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.swtor.com
ETA: December

Publisher: Grinding Gear Games
Developer: In-house
Heritage: None
Link: www.pathofexile.com
ETA: Early 2012

Path of Exile

Which path will you choose?

"Just like Diablo, Path of Exile is an action RPG played from an overhead perspective"



It has often been a source of wonder as to why Blizzard, the publishers behind the world biggest MMO World of Warcraft, have never turned their sights into releasing an online version of their best-selling Diablo series of games. A dark fantasy action RPG, the games are ideal for an MMO makeover. As nice an idea as that is, it's apparent that this is not going to happen in the near future. Blizzard are concentrating on finishing Diablo III in time for next year, with a release date as yet unknown and no MMO plans for the foreseeable future.

New Zealand developers Grinding Gear Games have seen this gap in the market and decided to do something about it. Just like Diablo, Path of Exile is an action RPG played from an overhead perspective that blends elements of dark fantasy with buckets of gore.

If that isn't enough to whet your appetite, then maybe the news that the game is going to be free-to-play will turn your head. Grinding Gear have pledged to not charge players a penny for signing up, although there will be an ethical micro-transaction policy in place, This basically means you will be able to purchase new visual customisations, but the core of the game will remain free for all.

On paper, the game as a whole is pretty much the same as Blizzard's creation, and its influences are clear to see. After creating a character you then join a party of friends, and once you are teamed up you then head into a randomly created dungeon to see what you can find.

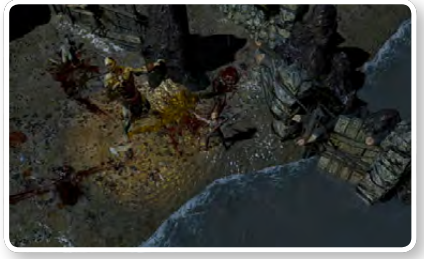
MINARA'S VIAL
CRYSTAL VIAL
LIFE RECOVERY: 91
MANA RECOVERY: 33
RECOVERY TIME: 3 SECONDS
CHARGES: 0 OF 3
EACH DRINK USES: 1 CHARGE
45% INCREASED LIFE/MANA RECOVERED
146% INCREASED EVASION DURING RECOVERY
YOU DEAL 30% LESS DAMAGE DURING RECOVERY
30% DECREASED PLAYER SIZE DURING RECOVERY
Right click to drink. Can only hold charges while in belt. Refills as you kill monsters.

Because these dungeons are freshly generated, you will be able to play through them again and again, improving your placing on one of several leagues in the game. Once you are in a dungeon you are pretty much left to your own devices,

Path of Exile continued

as you set about exploring and collecting treasure.

As you progress in the game you gain experience which you can use to level up and obtain new skills. Depending on which you select, you can make your character stronger or more dexterous, allowing them to take on harder and more powerful enemies. One thing is for sure, you will definitely need to invest in a sturdy mouse, as combat involves a fair amount of button-mashing,



and judging from the screenshots we have seen so far, the action will come at a frantic pace.

A dungeon romp in the purest sense of the word, this game looks amazing, with plenty of gory graphics to spice things up and silky-smooth animation. We have a strong feeling that Path of Exile will play as good as it looks too. A closed Beta has just been announced, with the public Beta to follow shortly before the game's official launch early in 2012. Get sharpening that sword, warrior, we have a feeling that you are going to need it.

Kaom's Primacy
Ancestral Axe
Weapon Class: Two Handed Axe
Quality: +6%
Physical Damage: 181 to 272
Elemental Damage: 18-28
Critical Strike Chance: 5%
Bonus Accuracy Rating: 14
Attacks per Second: 1.25
Requires: Level 37, 83 Str, 59 Dex
105% Increased Physical Damage
Adds 18-28 Fire Damage
+58 to Accuracy Rating
+20 Life Gained when you Deal a Killing Blow
Culling Strike
Kaom slaughtered the weakest tribe leaders one by one, until the remaining ones were eager to join his cause.

At any point in the game you can delve into your inventory to change your armour or weapons.

THE CONDEMNED

So why exactly is the game called Path of Exile? That's an easy one. You play the role of a character who has been imprisoned on an continent inhabited by other convicts and cutthroats. In order to survive, you must find friends and band together to explore the dungeons, discover treasure and grow in power. This is the only way of surviving the dangers of the island. Will you ever escape? No chance, but you will sure have fun trying.

MMOZine Verdict

Offering blood and guts combat with more than a few echoes of the Diablo franchise

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft series, Diablo series
Link: www.wow-europe.com
OUT NOW

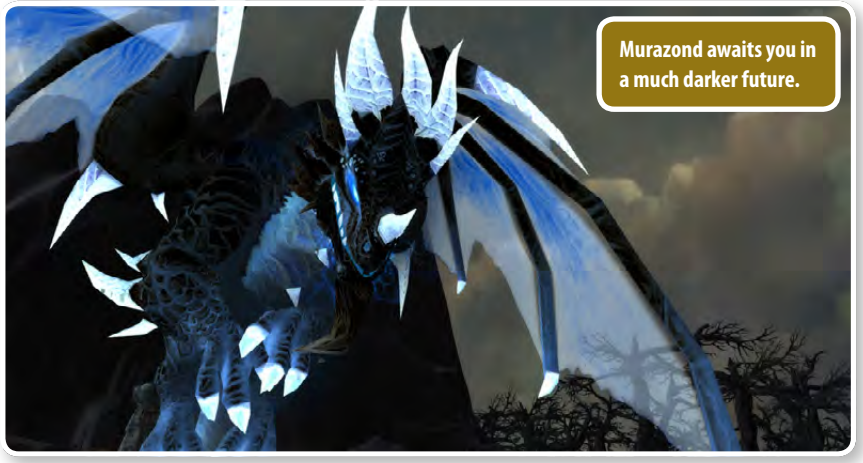
> *"You can't just stomp up to Deathwing and punch him on the nose"*

The Hour of Twilight is at hand!

Cataclysm launched a year ago, and it's fair to say that it's been an interesting year for WoW players. We've had three patches, a whole raft of changes and an epic storyline which has seen the Aspect of Death return to Azeroth and literally tear the continents apart. This was the expansion that everyone wanted, even though many aspects disappointed. Can this final patch redeem what has to be WoW's worst year?

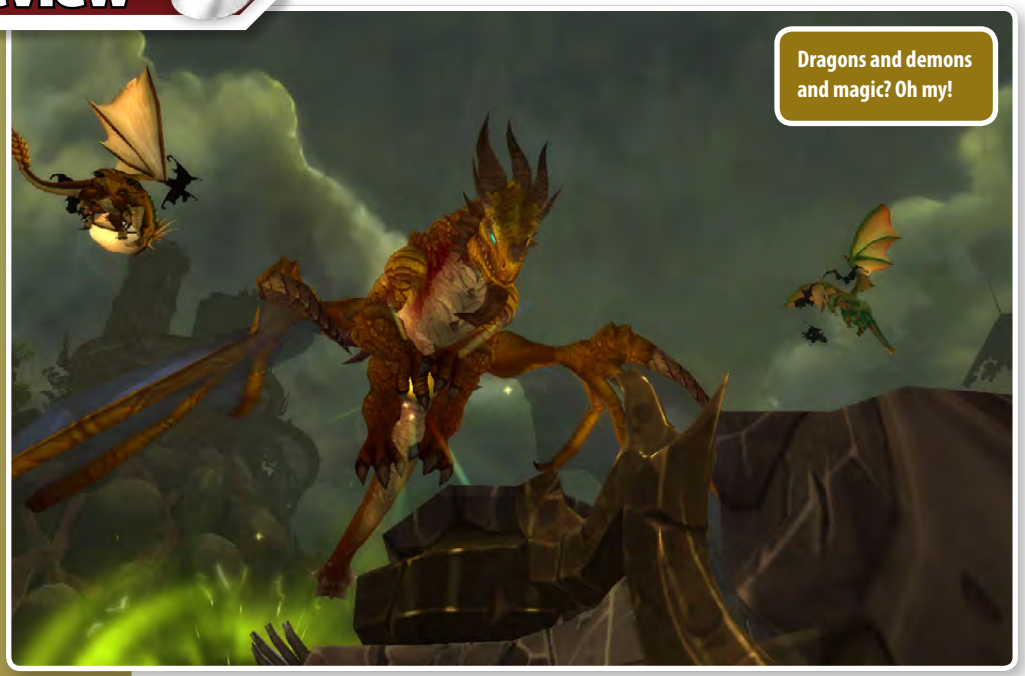
Deathwing has cast a shadow over Azeroth since Cataclysm began. He's been flying across random zones since the expansion launched, obliterating towns, players and NPCs in a haze of fiery chaos. We've fought his minions – Ragnaros, the Twilight Hammer, Sinestra, Cho'gall – and so far all have fallen. Now it's time for us to deal with the dragon Aspect himself and some of the greatest legends of WoW lore.

As with Fall of the Lich King – the final content patch from the previous expansion, you can't just stomp up to Deathwing and punch him in the nose. Oh no, it's a little more interesting than that. First, at least lore-wise, you need to do the three five-man dungeons which feed into the raid. The first, End Time, takes you to a dark version of Dragonblight in Northrend. In this twisted possible future, Deathwing's corpse looms, impaled on the pinnacle of Wrymrest Temple and echoes of current racial leaders wander the four Dragonshrines. Once defeated, it's time to face the leader of the Twilight



Murazond awaits you in a much darker future.

The Twilight Father stands between you and Deathwing.



Hour of Twilight cont.

Hammer, a Twilight dragon named Murozond – a possible-future form of the Timeless Aspect, Nozdormu.

With him defeated, Nozdormu can send you back into the past to recover the Dragon Soul, the only thing capable of defeating Deathwing. This involves returning to Kalimdor before it split into the three continents we know today, to the city of Zin-Azshari and the palace of Queen Azshara. On the banks of the Well of Eternity and face Azshara herself, aided by some legendary NPCs. Then, with the Dragon Soul in hand, it's time to return to the present and escort Thrall safely to Wrymrest Temple. There you have to defeat the Twilight Hammer's biggest badasses, including the Twilight Father himself, Benedictus. Alliance players will recognise him as the former Archbishop of Stormwind and advisor to Varian Wrynn himself.

The World Breaker

After facing numerous bosses, it's then time to deal with the Worldbreaker. In scope, the raid is epic. It features seven bosses, of which Deathwing is the focus of the final two encounters, which include a ginormous Twilight Dragon which dwarfs the temple. Finally though, Thrall unleashes the Dragon Soul and the final stand begins. The raid also includes four action-packed but short in-game cinematics which showcase the power of the storyline as only Blizzard can. Once defeated, the Cataclysm ends and – as Alexstrasza beautifully phrases it – the Age of Mortals has begun.

A MATTER OF TIME

Time travel plays a bigger role in Hour of Twilight. Here's where you'll be going.

FUTURE | PAST | PRESENT

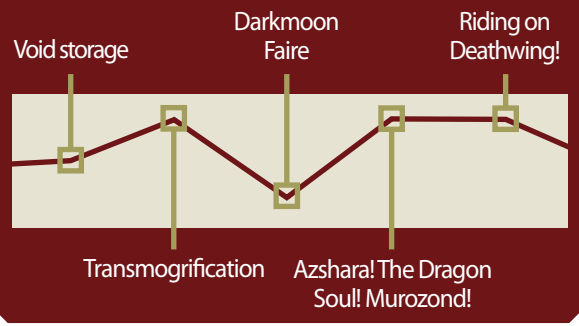
Deathwing's corpse dominates a future Dragonblight where former leaders wander.

FANGS OF THE FATHER

Legendaries are a traditional part of epic storylines and this time it's the turn of Rogues. Way back in the Badlands, players did a quest chain which concluded with the discovery of a single, untarnished black dragon egg. This egg has now hatched and Rogues will become the minions of Wrathion, the Black Prince, who wants Deathwing to pay. The resulting daggers not only look awesome but they also give you the illusion of black dragon wings!

This mighty Twilight Dragon is one of the bosses in the Dragon Soul raid.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



Hour of Twilight cont.

Hour of Twilight is the end- game patch, the one dominated by lore-packed dungeons and raids, but this time Blizzard has really focused on adding in a tonne of new features which make gameplay easier or just more fun. This includes numerous other goodies including racial mounts for Worgen, new spell animations, the Raid Finder and a new boss in Tol Barad, the hate-filled Alizabal.

But the biggest additions are Void Storage and Transmogrification. These new features kind of work in tandem, with the Ethereals offering to put your unwanted items in long-term storage (for a fee, of course) and also offering a cosmetic service which will make your gear and weapons look like your favourite sets but retaining the stats of your level 358 gear. There are limits, of course, but it's a great start to adding a little more individuality to a game which has just past its seventh birthday.

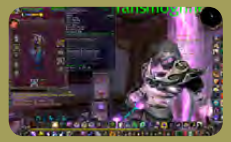
The Darkmoon Faire is also seeing a revamp, with the travelling faire now located on its own spooky island – even if it's still only active for just a part of the month. Rogues are also seeing a lengthy and lore-packed quest line which sees them aiding the Black Prince, Wrathion, in exchange for a pair of legendary daggers collectively named Fangs of the Father. Oh and let's not forget the plethora of new mounts and pets to collect.

To be totally honest, Cataclysm hasn't been the best of WoW expansions but, still, it has pushed boundaries, and this final patch has attempted to get players excited for Mists of Pandaria. The fight against Deathwing has come to its natural end but, boy, what an ending.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…

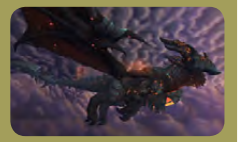
LONG-TERM STORAGE
Head to a capital city to activate your Void Storage. It costs but it's worth it.



COSMETIC OVERHAUL
Turn your most recent gear retro by transmogrifying your gear and weapons.

ANIMATION OVERLOAD
Check out all the new spell animations which have been added into the game.

WELL OF ETERNITY
Head to the Caverns of Time to do the new five-man heroic dungeons.



DOWNING DEATHWING
Confront the Aspect of Death himself with nine/24 of your friends.

MMOZine Verdict

After a year, kicking an end-game boss' arse has never felt so good

- ✓ New dungeons and end-game raid
- ✓ Lore-rich
- ✗ Dungeons are easy

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: In-house
Heritage: Star Wars: Galaxies, Everquest, PlanetSide
Link: www.dcuniverseonline.com
OUT NOW

DC Universe Online

"Simply put, DC has always been a company which works strictly off the page"

Yet another superhero MMO has gone free-to-play. We check to see if DCUO is in a league of its own

When it comes to graphic novels Marvel has always been considered the more accessible publisher when compared to DC's constantly wacky approach. In which other sci-fi universe could you have a character as humourless as Batman, yet still have room for talking gorillas, maniacal queen bees and a man who only uses his magic ring to fight menaces from beyond. Simply put, DC has always been a company which works strictly off the page, with imaginative enemies, bizarre twists and an occasionally 'campy' style which makes their universe engaging and unique. So what does this have to do with Universe Online? Well, SOE has captured the essence of what makes this property so endearing with well-animated FMV, top tier voice actors and well-realised recreations of Gotham, Metropolis and even the Justice League's Watchtower. The attention to authenticity here is absolutely staggering with Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy reprising their roles as The Joker and Batman respectively, along with other animated renditions fans will instantly recognise.

Rather than playing as any of DC's heroes, your character is cast as one of many mentees after Lex Luthor wittingly dispenses super-power granting Exobytes throughout society to avoid a future where Brainiac is the ruler of Earth. If all of this is new to you don't worry, as the game introduces this high-concept drivel brilliantly and it nicely excuses the fact that you'll be running around with hundreds of other superbeings on servers.

The premise has promise and the presentation is of the highest

To give you an idea of how often you'll be dealing with the 'real heroes', Superman appears in the tutorial zone!

The amount of powersets on offer isn't as numerous as City of Heroes, but there's still lots.

The effects to convey the various different powersets are really well done and appropriately colourful.

DC Universe cont.

calibre, yet unfortunately where DC Universe Online starts to unravel is in the gameplay stakes.

Due to this MMO appearing both on PC and PlayStation 3 an odd compromise has been made regarding the interface and the controls. Rather than having a mouse pointer present at all times, it's only available in menus, so at first some players will struggle just to perform the basic MMO functionality, like using the chat box.

After some delving around in the options menu you'll realise that everything is button-press orientated and it takes a while to drum into your conscious what keys do what. These concessions are absolutely maddening as other multi-platform titles like Final Fantasy XIV have come up with dual interfaces optimised for both platforms, and even after nearly a year in the wilderness these issues still aren't fixed.

Combat too feels much more aimed at console owners, but in this case that's actually a good thing. Rather than there being an auto-attack, you need to orchestrate each blow yourself with brawler-type button commands to pull off certain moves in addition to firing off skills via the hot-bar. It's an interesting hybrid system which makes combat instantly more enjoyable, after you get used to it. And there's lots of opportunities to do so as the quest design rarely offers variety, instead most of the time you'll just be asked to go to a certain quadrant of a city, kill a certain number of enemies, press E to interact with a few things and

Taking inspiration from over 70 years worth of DC results in very varied enemy design.

Occasionally you'll come across a ugly texture which doesn't really belong in a modern MMO.

DC Universe cont.

from there your superhero overseer will congratulate you for doing a good job. The fiction which supports these activities is pulpy, but the objectives unfortunately are anything but. There are optional time trials and instanced missions to vary things up occasionally, but after a few hours you'll need to give yourself a break just so you don't hear the constant sound of punching and kicking echoing around your psyche any more.

Thankfully the progression curve is surprisingly charitable, and from level five onwards you'll be surprised just how powerful you can make your character. The traversal powers in particular are a delight, and zipping around Metropolis as a clone of The Flash was brilliant and easily as enjoyable as flying around Paragon City for the first time in City of Heroes.

All in all, SOE's fully licensed endeavour is an odd mishmash of ideas which has the potential to be something truly special, but the developers need to make the questing content more varied with more content spread throughout the progression curve. The transition to a free-to-play model hasn't hurt in any way though, as servers are full, the in-game shop works well and there aren't any pop-ups at any time to bash you over the head with purchasing opportunities. There's still the option to subscribe if you want, and you can always pay piece meal by purchasing PvP editions of the main heroes, extra character slots, story arcs and visually appealing costume pieces if you must, but many will see a lot of what this game has to offer without spending a penny. That may not be good for DC or SOE, but for comicbook fans and those who are looking for something different, DCUO might be right up their alley, or at the very least a fun distraction for a couple of weeks.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life

Which DC hero am I most like?
Getting ordered around by Superman
Getting lost in DC's crazy lore
Kill 25 of Y and interact with 10 of X. Gah!
Waiting for enemies to respawn

INSPIRATIONAL

Rather than just creating a character from your own imagination (a la City of Heroes), in DCUO you choose an inspiration to base you character on. Hero and villain choices are available, and whoever you choose will have a key role in the early levels of progression. This is a really affective inclusion which ensures not only that you emulate your favourite superhero, but also you get to interact with them and fight their arch-enemies, too.

MMOZine Verdict

Not a success in every area, but well worth sampling

- ✓ Very accessible
- ✓ Makes the most of the DC universe and its key players
- ✗ Questing content gets very old, very fast

In MMOZine Issue 36

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Is this the MMO we've been looking for? Join us in issue 36 for the only review of The Old Republic that you'll need to read.

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Cranberry Publishing Limited
www.cranberrypublishing.com
Publishing Director: Dave Taylor
Email: dave.taylor@cranberrypublishing.com
Editorial Director: Dan Hutchinson
Email: dan.hutchinson@cranberrypublishing.com
Commercial Director: Duncan Ferguson
Email: duncan.ferguson@cranberrypublishing.com
Telephone: 07770 648500
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Writers: Mark Pilkington, Lesley Smith, Andy Griffiths

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